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showered on it, and it is often garlanded. Incantations and *mantras* are recited by the priest during the ceremony. 796
782

Bell-metal oil lamps are lit in front of the images and their number is usually 3, 5 or 7. In each lamp there are 5 to 7 wicks pointing in different directions. Only coco-nut oil or *ghee* is used in these ceremonial lamps. In front of these lamps are placed three banana leaves with the cut end of the leaf facing the image and the tip pointing away from it, facing north or east. On one of the leaves some uncooked rice is placed and a husked coco-nut is kept over it, while in the other leaf unhusked paddy is heaped with a coco-nut placed on it. The eyes of the coco-nut are away from the snake idol and are towards the tip of the banana leaf. On the third leaf are placed a few small bananas of a special variety called *kadali*, because *kadali* is referred to in the Vedas. [354]
[801]

The boiled rice offering is then placed near the shrine and some money is offered to the idol by dropping it in the oil of the lamp. These preparations are offered to the snake god who is supposed to partake of them. Thereafter the *prasad* or the offering is distributed among the members of the family, and the priest gets half of it. The *prasad* must not be eaten by a crow or dog as this is a bad omen. After the worship, the contents of the leaves are given to the priest who therefore takes great pains to see that this particular ceremony is well conducted. 225
[807]

Once a month or once every three months, low caste Hindus called Pulluvans visit the houses which have snake shrines. Usually they come on Tuesdays or Fridays, and they sing songs in praise of the snake gods. This is done in a rather crude manner to the accompaniment of crude single-stringed instruments called *veena kunju*. For this invocation, an oil lamp is lit before the shrine, and the above-mentioned three banana leaves and their respective contents are placed before the image of the serpent. Usually a woman accompanies the male singer and joins in the chorus, playing the while upon a crude drum. After the praise has been adequately rendered, the ceremony is brought to a close and the musician gets his share of money and materials. This ceremony is meant to propitiate and 782
796
566
[533]
[534]

form of a contest between the bridegroom and the bride's 588
 relatives, and which are symbolic survivals of marriage 184
 by capture. The Manavālan and the girl next partake
 of food together in the inner pandal—a proceeding which
 obviously corresponds to the ceremonious first meal of a
 newly-married couple. The assembled guests are lavishly [574]
 entertained. The chief Kovilagans and big Nāyar
 houses will feed 1,000 Brāhmanas as well as their own
 relations, and spend anything up to ten or fifteen
 thousand rupees on the ceremony."

Concerning the tāli-kettu ceremony in Travancore
 Mr. N. Subramani Aiyar writes as follows. "After the
 age of eleven, a Nāyar girl becomes too old for this
 ceremony, though, in some rare instances, it is celebrated
 after a girl attains her age. As among other castes, ages [807] ●
 represented by an odd number, *e.g.*, seven, nine, and
 eleven, have a peculiar auspiciousness attached to them.
 Any number of girls, even up to a dozen, may go through
 the ceremony at one time, and they may include infants
 under one year—an arrangement prompted by consi-
 derations of economy, and rendered possible by the fact
 that no civil or religious right or liability is contracted as
 between the parties. The duty of getting the girls of
 the tarwad 'married' devolves on the karanavan, or in
 his default on the eldest brother, the father's obligation
 being discharged by informing him that the time for the
 ceremony has arrived. The masters of the ceremonies at [622]
 a Nāyar tāli-kettu in Travancore are called Machcham-
 pikkar, *i.e.*, men in the village, whose social status is equal
 to that of the tarwad in which the ceremony is to be
 celebrated. At a preliminary meeting of the Machcham-
 pikkar, the number of girls for whom the ceremony is to
 be performed, the bridegrooms, and other details are
 settled. The horoscopes are examined by the village [787]